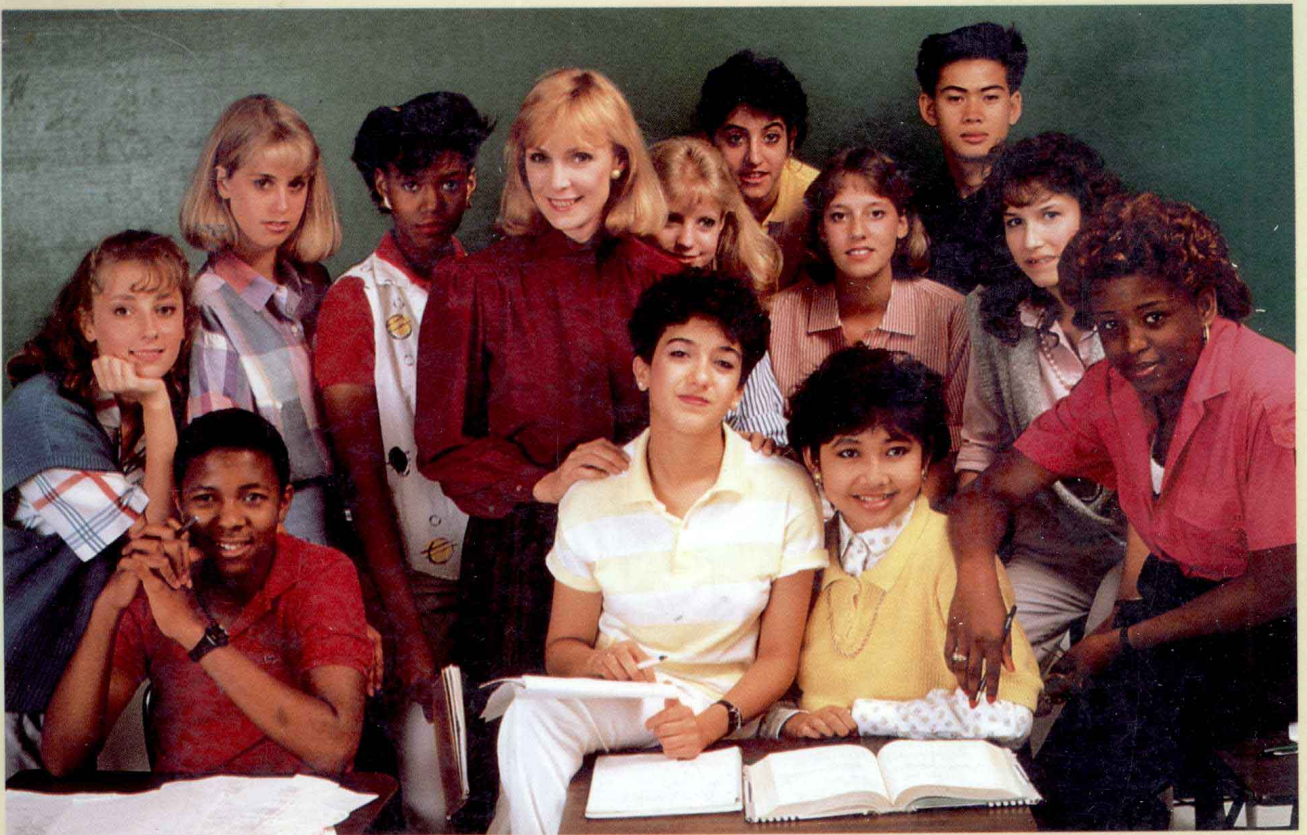


# HUMAN DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION

AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH



**Kenneth Cushner**  
**Averil McClelland**  
**Philip Safford**

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Kenneth Cushner  
Averil McClelland  
Philip Safford

Kent State University

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## **HUMAN DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION**

### **An Integrative Approach**

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# PREFACE

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This book is about human differences—physical, social, and psychological differences. More specifically, it is about the ways in which human differences are experienced in school, and about teaching practices that view those differences as resources, not deficits. It is a book that we hope will both inform and disturb you. We want to *move* you to think, to feel, to understand the concept of difference—what it means in the lives of students and teachers.

It is important to note that recent conceptions of diversity are expanding to include differences based on gender, ethnicity, race, class, culture, age, and handicapping condition. However, our knowledge of how these differences affect human interaction is relatively new and has not yet found its way into our visions of schooling or teacher education. Meanwhile our school-age population is rapidly becoming increasingly poor and increasingly nonwhite, while the majority of those entering teaching continue to be white, middle class, and female. Fewer than 12 percent of entering teachers represent what we have traditionally termed minority populations.

This book is an attempt to address this issue. It does not offer simple, easy-to-follow guidelines. Rather it attempts to capture the *experience* of diversity from a variety of perspectives and to offer general frameworks within which specific problem situations can be addressed. Many people ask us to provide them with cookbook approaches to working with difference. However, we cannot. We are convinced that such cookbook approaches are not only impossible, but also unethical given the realities of today's schools.

Throughout this book we have attempted to outline an approach to human diversity that differs from much of the contemporary literature. We do not equate diversity with a notion of the “other.” Rather, we begin with the proposition that all Americans are, to some degree, multicultural because they live in a multicultural society. Although we describe and give many examples of differences between particular ethnic, racial, religious, class, gender, and exceptionality groups, ours is not a “group” approach. We are aware that there is as much diversity *within* groups as *among* them, and thus we are inclined to focus on the individual rather than the group.

The book is divided into three major parts. In Part One, we begin with a general exploration of the issues related to diversity and the individual. Our centerpiece is a culture-general framework for understanding intercultural interactions. Such a framework helps illuminate common aspects of intercultural interactions, including the strong emotional experiences one is likely to have when confronted with those who are very different

from oneself. In Part Two, we explore how the various issues of multicultural education, gender-sensitive education, and special education have been addressed in the United States. Part Three provides a review of practical strategies which the professional can use to help reframe her or his interactions in the classroom. Again, we have avoided the temptation to be prescriptive, believing that the professional educator is the only one really able to survey particular classrooms and/or schools, explore possible strategies, and then make changes that fit local needs.

We want to stress our belief in the power of individual teachers and schools both to reconceptualize the nature of schooling in a diverse society and to make whatever specific modifications are needed in particular contexts. Changes will not occur overnight, and they will often be met with considerable resistance. Consequently, we must learn to measure our successes in inches rather than miles, realizing that the momentum gained through many small steps will eventually produce the larger changes so badly needed.

At this point we would like to thank the many individuals who have helped to make this book possible. Judy Charlick, Brian Grieves, David Grossman, Neal Grove, Will Hayes, Denise Stewart, Bob Vadas, and Linda Zimmer-Vadas all provided critical incidents. Elizabeth Safford was tireless in tracking down many of the literary excerpts that add spice to the book. Our editor, Lane Akers, helped clarify our vision of the book and helped to stimulate us and keep us on track. Valuable feedback was provided by our reviewers: Nicholas Appleton, Arizona State University; Kenneth Carlson, Rutgers University; Paul Markham, University of Maryland; Myra and David Sadker, American University; Kenneth Teitelbaum, SUNY Binghamton; Linda Tillman, Kent State University; and Nancy Winitzky, University of Utah. For their time, effort, and encouragement we are extremely grateful.

Finally, we invite all readers of this text, both instructors and students, to share with us your own experience in dealing with diversity, so that we might integrate it with our own and with others' scholarship in this fast-growing field.

*Kenneth Cushner*  
*Averil McClelland*  
*Philip Safford*

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PART **ONE**

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**HUMAN DIVERSITY:  
A PROBLEM AND  
AN OPPORTUNITY**

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# 1

CHAPTER

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## HUMAN DIVERSITY AND EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

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Alice: "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"  
The Cat: "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to."

Lewis Carroll

## HUMAN DIVERSITY AS EXPERIENCE: THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*<sup>1</sup> is a classic story about a little girl who finds herself in a fantastic world quite unlike the world she is used to. All the rules of perception and behavior that she has come to believe are normal and right are turned inside out and upside down in the strange land at the bottom of the rabbit hole, and she must learn about other ways of thinking, other ways of knowing, and other ways of acting.

Like many novelists, Lewis Carroll told the story of Alice as a way of pointing out some of the peculiar aspects of the society in which he lived. He hoped, perhaps, that his readers might learn something about their own world by reading about Alice's odd and sometimes funny experiences.

Storytelling is a time-honored way of teaching because it creates scenes that we can imagine in our minds, that we can look at somewhat objectively, and that we can identify with and learn from. Carol Christ writes that "without stories there is no articulation of experience. . . . Stories give shape to lives. As people grow up, reach plateaus, or face crises, they often turn to stories to show them how to take the next step."<sup>2</sup> Stories often are meaningful to people on several levels. At one level they may be simply entertaining. At another, they may illustrate ideas or morals or values common to a group of people. And at still another level, they may create meaning in people's lives by identifying unnamed feelings and experiences for those who read or hear them. This capacity for "depth" is one of the most important attributes of stories, for it allows us to use them to describe very complex ideas. Christ notes that

the importance of stories [is] something most people intuitively know. When meeting new friends or lovers people reenact the ritual of telling stories. Why? Because they sense that the meaning of their lives is revealed in the stories they tell, in their perception of the forces they contended with, in the choices they made, in their feelings about what they did or did not do.<sup>3</sup>

There are a great many stories in this book, partly because we believe that learning should be a meaningful experience in and of itself. Some stories are about people who really lived or are living and events that actually happened. Others are fables, folktales, or parables, often from other societies. Still others have been created to illustrate certain ideas and concepts, or to offer a set of possible solutions to problems. To a large extent, however, we use stories for their power to speak about complex human experiences—in this case, about the experiences people have with the fact of human diversity.

In some ways, then, this is a book of stories that, like the story of Alice, tell about different life worlds in which people participate. And because, in order to venture into



different worlds, it is necessary to leave our own, we will begin with a story about just how hard it is to leave cherished beliefs and values behind.

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### *A Parable*

Once upon a time there was a group of people who lived in the mountains in an isolated region. One day a stranger passed through their area and dropped some wheat grains in their field. The wheat grew. After a number of years, people noticed the new plant and decided to collect its seeds and chew them. Someone noticed that when a cart had accidentally ridden over some of the seeds, a harder outer covering separated from the seed and what was inside was sweeter. Someone else noticed that when it rained, the grains that had been run over expanded a little, and the hot sun cooked them. So, people started making wheat cereal and cracked wheat and other wheat dishes. Wheat became the staple of their diet.

Years passed. Because these people did not know anything about crop rotation, fertilizers, and cross-pollination, the wheat crop eventually began to fail.

About this time, another stranger happened by. He was carrying two sacks of barley. He saw the people starving and planted some of his grain. The barley grew well. He presented it to the people and showed them how to make bread and soup and many other dishes from barley. But they called him a heretic.

"You are trying to undermine our way of life and force us into accepting you as our king." They saw his trick. "You can't fool us. You are trying to weaken us and make us accept your ways. Our wheat will not let us starve. Your barley is evil."

He stayed in the area, but the people avoided him. Years passed. The wheat crop failed again and again. The children suffered from malnutrition. One day the stranger came to the market and said, "Wheat is a grain. My barley has a similar quality. It is also a grain. Why don't we just call the barley grain?"

Now since they were suffering so much, the people took the grain, except for a few who staunchly refused. They loudly proclaimed that they were the only remaining followers of the True Way, the Religion of Wheat. A few new people joined the Wheat Religion from time to time, but most began to eat barley. They called themselves *The Grainers*.

For generations, the Wheat Religion people brought up their children to remember the true food called wheat. A few of them hoarded some wheat grains to keep it safe and sacred. Others sent their children off in search of wheat, because they felt that if one person could happen by with barley, wheat might be known somewhere else too.

And so it went for decades, until the barley crop began to fail. The last few Wheat Religion people planted their wheat again. It grew beautifully, and because it grew so well, they grew bold and began to proclaim that their wheat was the only true food. Most people resisted and called them heretics. A few people said, "Why don't you just admit that wheat is a grain?"

The wheat growers agreed, thinking that they could get many more wheat followers if they called it *grain*. But by this time, some of the children of the Wheat Religion children began to return from their adventures with new seed—not just wheat, but rye and buckwheat and millet. Now people began to enjoy the taste of many different grains. They took turns planting them and trading the seed to each other. In this way, everyone came to have enough sustenance and lived happily ever after.<sup>4</sup>

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